

Centre for Applied Philosophy, Politics and Ethics

Third Research Seminar Series in Political Philosophy
Thinking the Political: The Work of Ernesto Laclau

Venue: Centre for Research Development, Grand Parade
(unless specified as Pavilion Parade, Staff Common Room)

This research seminar, hosted by CAPPE and the Faculty of Arts, is aimed at staff and PhD students interested in contemporary politics, philosophy and critical theory. Every year we focus on a different theorist or issue, engaging in a close critical reading of their work. In previous years we have looked at Badiou, at Adorno and recently at the financial crisis. This year our reading of Laclau's work finishes with a major international conference; Ernesto Laclau: Thinking the Political, at which he will be the keynote speaker.

In Term 1 we engage in a critical introduction to Laclau's project, and its development as a critique of Marxism in the 70s and 80s. This does not require that any prior knowledge of Laclau's work. Those interested in introductory texts should purchase Howarth's Discourse. Term 2 looks at the development of Laclau's thought through the 90s and into the 21st Century, with particular focus on his most recent book On Populist Reason. If you would like to attend please email Mark Devenney on md17@brighton.ac.uk.

All sessions will be held between 4.30pm and 7.00pm on Mondays. I will distribute a reading pack to those who attend the course. The course will comprise a mix of close reading of texts, with introductory overviews of key issues.

COURSE OUTLINE

Part 1: Marxist Beginnings

The Course begins with an exploration of the early development of Laclau's ideas, through a critical reading of his debates with key Marxist theorists in the 1970s including Poulantsaz, Miliband and Althusser. Discussion will focus on the relationship between politics, ideology and economy in Marxist theory. We focus too on Laclau's early defence of Populist politics, discuss its relation to do called 'workerism', and begin to consider his transformation of the category of hegemony, as first outlined by Gramsci.

Session 1:

'Latin American' Politics and the Limits of Marxism

Monday 12th of November 2012, Centre for Research Development (CRD)

Reading

Laclau, Ernesto (1970) 'Imperialist Strategy and the May Crisis' in New Left Review, July/August, at web address: <http://newleftreview.org/I/62/ernesto-laclau-argentina-imperialist-strategy-and-the-may-crisis>

Laclau, Ernesto (1971) 'Feudalism and Capitalism in Latin America' in New Left Review, May-June 1971 at web address: <http://newleftreview.org/I/67/ernesto-laclau-feudalism-and-capitalism-in-latin-america>

Session 2: Thinking the Specificity of the Political

Monday 19th of November 2012, Staff Common Room Pavilion Parade

Reading

Laclau, Ernesto (1975) 'The Specificity of the Political: The Poulantsaz Miliband Debate' Economy and Society. Volume 4, issue 1 and chapter 2 in Laclau, Ernesto (1977) in Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory, New Left Books, pp.51-81.

Laclau, Ernesto (1977) 'Fascism and Ideology' chapter 3 in Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory, New Left Books, pp. 81-143.

Poulantsaz, Nicos (1976) 'The Capitalist State: A Reply to Laclau and Miliband' in New Left Review at web address: <http://newleftreview.org/I/95/nicos-poulantzas-the-capitalist-state-a-reply-to-miliband-and-laclau>

Session 3: Breaking with Marxism: Populist Politics

Monday 26th of November 2012 Centre for Research Development

Reading

Laclau, Ernesto (1977) 'Towards a Theory of Populism' chapter 4 in Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory, New Left Books, pp. 143-200.

Laclau, Ernesto, (1983) 'Socialism, the People, Democracy' - The Transformation of Hegemonic Logic' in Social Text, No. 7. (Spring - Summer, 1983), pp. 115-119.

Part 2: The Limits of Marxism?

Hegemony and Socialist Strategy marks a radical break with Marxist politics, with the idea the primary antagonism in capitalist societies is class, and with the politics of the Western European communist parties. In these 4 weeks we look in detail at Laclau and Mouffes' deconstruction of this tradition, and their deployment of a set of key concepts which define post-Marxism: discourse, contingency, hegemony, articulation and equivalence. We also explore their development of ideas from Derrida and from Lacan, and consequences for the conceptualisation of negativity.

**Session 4: Hegemony and Socialist Strategy 1: Deconstructing Western Marxism
(Monday 3rd of December 2012 Staff Common Room, Pavilion Parade)**

Reading

Laclau and Mouffe (1985) chapters 1 and 2 of Hegemony and Socialist Strategy, London: Verso.

**Session 5: Hegemony and Socialist Strategy 1: Socialism after Marxism?
Articulation, Hegemony and neo-liberal politics
Monday 7th of January 2013 CRD**

Laclau and Mouffe (1985) chapters 3 and 4 of Hegemony and Socialist Strategy, London: Verso.

**Session 6: Discourse,
Monday 14th of January 2013 CRD to be confirmed**

Laclau and Mouffe (1987) 'Post-Marxism Without Apologies' New Left Review at web address: <http://newleftreview.org/I/166/ernesto-laclau-chantal-mouffe-post-marxism-without-apologies>

Geras, Norman (1987) 'Post-Marxism?' in New Left Review at web address: <http://newleftreview.org/I/163/norman-geras-post-marxism>

Laclau, Ernesto (1993) 'Discourse' in Blackwell Companion to Continental Philosophy, at web address <http://phil.sdu.edu.cn/sts/TuShu%5Cupfiles%5Cd7707d74-67b1-49e2-a00a-9bf44b518fc1.pdf>

In this session we carefully deconstruct the concept of Discourse, which is central to the theoretical arguments developed by Laclau, while addressing the critique of Laclau and Mouffe from Norman Geras.

Session 7: Antagonism and Dislocation: Lacan and Derrida
Monday 21st of January 2013 CRD to be confirmed

Laclau, Ernesto (1995) 'The Time is Out of Joint' published in Diacritics, vol. 25, nno.2, pp.85-96 (copy provided to participants)

Laclau, Ernesto (1996) 'Deconstruction, Pragmatism and Hegemony' in Deconstruction and Hegemony, pp.47-69.

Stavrakakis, Yannis and Glynos, Jason (2004) 'Sussing out the Limits of Laclau's Embrace of Lacan' in Laclau: A Critical Reader, pp. 201-217, London, Routledge.

Zizek, Slavoj (2007) 'Against the Politics of Jouissance' at website

<http://www.lacan.com/zizliberal.htm>.

Laclau, Ernesto (2004) selections from 'A Reply' in Laclau: A Critical Reader, London, Routledge.

Part 3: Rethinking Political Theory

The deconstruction of Marxism by Laclau, also had implications for the thinking of key concepts in the Political Theory tradition including emancipation, revolution, democracy, subjectivity, and Universalism. In these seminars we evaluate the transformation of these concepts effected by the deployment of the logics of contingency defended by Laclau.

Session 8: Emancipation, Revolution, Democracy and Contingency
Monday 4th of February 2013 CRD

Laclau, Ernesto (1998) 'Beyond Emancipation' chapter 1 in Emancipations, London, Verso.

Laclau, Ernesto (2001) 'Democracy and the Question of Power' in Constellations, Volume 8, number 1, at web address:

<http://www.unc.edu/courses/2005fall/geog/160/001/GEC%2705/laclau.pdf>.

Session 9: The Subject of Politics
Monday 11th of February, 2013 CRD

Laclau, Ernesto (1997) 'Subject of Politics, Politics of the Subject' chapter 4 in Emancipations, *opcit.*

Laclau, Ernesto (1987) 'Psychoanalysis and Marxism' in Critical Inquiry, Volume 13, No. 2, pp.330-333.

Session 10: Universalism: The relationship between Ontic and Ontological
Monday 25th of February 2013 CRD

Laclau, Ernesto (1992) 'Universalism, Particularism and the Question of Identity' in October, volume 61, pp.83-90.

Laclau, Ernesto (1997) 'Why Do Empty Signifiers Matter to Politics' chapter 3 in Emancipations, *opcit.*

Part 4: In Defence of Populist Politics?

The Course concludes by returning to Laclau's defence of populism, and Žizek's critique thereof. We look first at how populism is reformulated in *On Populist Reason*, before addressing the critique of Laclau by Žizek, who argues that Laclau has given up on the critique of capitalism altogether.

Session 12: On Populist Reason 1 Monday 4th of March, 2013 CRD

Laclau, Ernesto, (2005) On Populist Reason, London, Verso.

Session 13: On Populist Reason 2 Monday 11th of March, 2013 CRD

Laclau, Ernesto, (2005) On Populist Reason, London, Verso.

Session 11: Žizek's Debate with Laclau: Knowledge, Being and Capitalism Monday 18th of March, 2013 CRD

Žižek, "Schlagend, Aber Nicht Treffend!," *Critical Inquiry* 33, no. Autumn (2006);
Žižek "Against the Populist Temptation," *Critical Inquiry* 32, no. Spring (2006);
Laclau, "Why Constructing a People Is the Main Task of Radical Politics," *Critical Inquiry* 32, no. Summer (2006).

Session 14: The Limits of Laclau's Discourse Theoretical Approach? Monday 25th of March, 2013 Room to be confirmed

CONFERENCE THINKING THE POLITICAL: THE WORK OF ERNESTO LACLAU

Wednesday 10th April – Friday 12th April 2013

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

**Ernesto Laclau
Paula Biglieri (University of Buenos Aires)
Oliver Marchart ([Universität Luzern](#))
Yannis Stavrakakis (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki)
Jelica Šumič Riha (Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts)**